DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 103 909 CS 201 970

AUTHOR Gere, Anne R.
TITLE Multicultural Education: Perspective and Prospect.
PUB DATE Mar 75
NOTE 11p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Conference on English Education (11th, Colorado Springs, March 20-22, 1975)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.76 HC-$1.58 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS *Cultural Education; *Cultural Pluralism; *English Curriculum; *English Programs; *Teaching Models
IDENTIFIERS *Multicultural Education

ABSTRACT

This paper argues that multicultural education highlighting minority or ethnic groups in both English classes and other classes cannot be isolated from the curriculum as a whole. The underlying impetus behind the institution of multicultural education is the emphasis of cultural pluralism and of working toward a society where all people can live harmoniously in an atmosphere of mutual respect. This cannot be accomplished if minority students are the only ones receiving multicultural education or if multicultural education is separated from the study of English. Theorists such as Gagne and Bloom, who have developed hierarchies of learning, can provide useful models for structuring multicultural material into sequences which facilitate congitive learning and help students develop their own identity. The work of Erikson, Ausubel, Rogers, Rath, Torrance and Bruner can also be helpful in establishing methods of teaching multicultural education in English classes. (TS)

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MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION: PERSPECTIVE AND PROSPECT

Anne R. Gere

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Multicultural Education: Perspective and Prospect

Multicultural education has changed markedly in the past thirty years, and English classes have been the scene of much of the change. After World War II and the founding of the United Nations in 1945, educators in the United States became concerned with understanding other cultures. While organizations such as the American Field Service, Youth for Understanding, and People to People were formed to provide secondary school students with opportunities for developing international understanding, English anthologies included literary selections designed to give students glimpses of cultures different from their own. Stories of Schweitzer's work in Africa and growing up in Mexico were standard fare, and during the senior year of high school which was traditionally devoted to English Literature (after American Literature was covered in the junior year), some attention was given to the people of Britain as well as their literature.

Until the mid-sixties, efforts at multicultural education were limited almost exclusively to cultures of foreign countries, and little attention was given to the diverse ethnic and minority groups within our own country. A publishing company which produced a text featuring racially integrated characters could not sell it during the late fifties. The popular texts until the mid-sixties featured a preponderance of literature by whites, and students were expected to acknowledge this as the great tradition regardless of their own ethnic or racial heritage. Study of language was as monolithic as the study of literature. The prescriptive Latinate model of grammar was the rule; the arbitrary usages which had developed in this country were regarded as "correct," and all dialectal deviations were denounced as incorrect. Students who had the misfortune to be born into a home where a dialect other than the

one decreed as standard was spoken, were punished in virtually all their English classes.

The increasing self-consciousness of minority and ethnic groups during the sixties had an effect upon education generally. The minorities and ethnics who had previously apologized for their differences from main-stream America began to assert their differences and even to demand that education give attention to the culture of groups other than whites of Northern European descent. Multicultural education began to have local implications as well as international ones. The salad bowl replaced the melting pot as a metaphor for the ideal United States culture.

English teachers, along with teachers in other disciplines, began to respond to the demands for attention to other American cultures. Lists of literature written by members of minority groups were compiled, texts were purchased, and teachers attended in-service sessions designed to acquaint them with literature which had not been included in their college training. It was fortuitous that the paper-back revolution occurred during this period of transition. English classes were no longer tied to the single anthology and were thus able to incorporate works by minority authors more quickly than if they had to wait for the next revision of an anthology. The initial efforts to highlight minority or ethnic groups in English classes and other classes often came in the form of special events isolated from the curriculum as a whole. Black History Week or Chicano Awareness Days which occurred frequently in the late sixties brought the works of minority or ethnic groups into focus, but often allowed them to be seen as separate from the mainstream of American culture.

While English teachers were trying to broaden the traditional approaches to literature, they were faced with compelling changes in the study of language. The work of Chomsky and his followers showed the fallacies of the prescriptive

grammar which had dominated the English classroom for so many years. Labov and others began to illustrate the logic of dialects other than Standard English, and English teachers were forced to recognize that what they had been marking "wrong" for so many years might simply be considered different. This is not to say that there were instant revolutions in English classes across the land, but the new developments in language study, coming as they did in concert with efforts to broaden the treatment of minority and ethnic groups in English classes led to significant changes.

While the early approaches to multicultural education were often fragmented and halting, they did lead to the accumulation of a significant body of resources. No honest English teacher today can say "I would be happy to use more material by minority authors, but I don't know where to find it." NCTE and a variety of interested individuals have provided extensive lists of materials on virtually every minority or ethnic group, many schools have in-service programs to acquaint teachers with multi-ethnic materials, and guidelines for judging the multicultural quality of a text are readily available. In the same way, no honest teacher of English today can say, "Those _____ (fill in the appropriate minority or ethnic group) kids just don't know how to talk or write, nothing they say makes any sense." Studies documenting the logic of non-standard dialects and the consistency of second language interference are available to anyone who cares to take notice.

With this initial phase of multicultural education in English over, it is time to consider new challenges. One of the current debates in the field is whether multicultural education is better conducted as a separate enterprise or as part of the general English curriculum. Those who argue for its separateness point out that when multicultural material is incorporated into the larger curriculum it can become a token effort. The one novel written by a black or native American can be read and dismissed as the required exercise,

not as something which belongs to a larger body with its own integrity. Further, students belonging to minority or ethnic groups will be deprived of the group identity which is so vital to their feelings of self-esteem if they are not allowed to study minority or ethnic literature with their peer group. These are both compelling arguments and cannot be dismissed lightly. It is true that many of us have been guilty of dealing with minority literature out of context. Darwin Turner warned us about this when he urged that minority or ethnic literature be approached with sensitivity and awareness of the totality of the culture from which it comes. He illustrated how minority literature taken out of context can reinforce the very prejudices and stereotypes we seek to remove.[1] It is also true that one of the underlying reasons for emphasizing a multicultural approach in English classes is to give minority and ethnic students an opportunity to take pride in their own race or group rather than vainly trying to become something they are not, and group solidarity and identity are important components of this.

However, there are even stronger arguments on the other side. Idealistic as it sounds, the underlying impetus behind the institution of multicultural education was to emphasize cultural pluralism, to work toward a society where people of all races, colors, political and religious beliefs can live in harmony in an atmosphere of mutual respect. We need only glance at a recent newspaper to see that these goals are far from accomplished. They cannot be accomplished if minority students are the only ones receiving multicultural education or if multicultural education is treated as an area separate from the discipline as a whole. In a recent study of community colleges, which maintain separate ethnic studies programs, Crouchett discovered that these programs have little effect upon the general faculty or their teaching.[2] Informal observation of high school courses yields the same information; as long as ethnic studies are treated as a separate enterprise they will remain

so, and the larger goals of multicultural education will have been sacrificed to special interest groups.

The limiting effects of separate multicultural education have another dimension. Separating students into special groups for special education because of the group identity which it affords them may well inhibit their development of individuality. This is best explained by the pluralist fallacy which Patterson defines as, "The failure to recognize a basic paradox in human interaction: the greater the diversity and cohesiveness of groups in a society, the smaller the diversity and personal autonomy of individuals in that society."[3] If we encourage the development of separate multicultural education, we may emphasize group identity to the detriment of the individuals within the group. Strength and cohesiveness within an ethnic or minority group are developed at the expense of the individuality of members of that group. We in English, where individual expression is encouraged and even demanded, need to think about the implications of separate multicultural work. This is as true in language as it is in literature. Black students are among the first to object to the study of Black English if they feel that is does not apply to them, and we must be as sensitive to their need for individuality as we are to their need for group pride.

If it is agreed that multicultural content must be incorporated into the general English curriculum and not treated as a separate unit, we are still faced with the problem of how to proceed. Multicultural education is a highly volatile area; a number of well-intentioned multicultural programs have been killed by the conflicting demands of various groups. People respond emotionaly to multicultural education because it has direct effects upon their perceptions of themselves and others. Feelings range from hostility and contempt to enthusiasm and delight, but people do respond emotionally when their accepted

speech patterns or favorite stereotypes are brought into question. Given this, special attention needs to be given to the methodology of multicultural education of the future. What we know about learning needs to be applied in unique ways to multicultural education.

In its most general terms, learning can be divided into affective, cognitive, and psycho-motor types. Multicultural education is concerned with a mixture of affective and cognitive learning with emphasis on the side of affect. The goals of multicultural education are affective ones; respect for others cannot be learned by cognitive means, but it can be learned when facts and concepts are combined with methods to aid change in thinking. Theorists such as Gagne and Bloom who have developed heirarchies of learning can provide useful models for structuring multicultural material into sequences which facilitate cognitive learning. However, the more difficult question of how the material is to be presented remains unanswered. The age of secondary school students is exactly right for them to be receptive to the kind of affective learning implied in multicultural education's goals. As Bloom points out, the environment has the greatest influence during the greatest period of change in human development. Thus, it is much easier for adolescents to change their views of various groups than it is for their parents to do the same. Further, as Erikson reminds us, adolescence is the age of identity versus role confusion, the age when the developing person tries to establish sexual identity as well as greater personal identity. If students can establish their own identities within the context of a pluralistic society, then there is reason to hope for future generations with greater acceptance for and appreciation of group and individual differences.

There are several learning theorists whose work seems especially applicable to multicultural education. Ausubel asserts that meaningful learning

is that which fits into one's system, and he develops a sequence of activities by which learning can proceed to this end. Rogers develops, along parallel lines, the need for process in learning; he insists that experiential learning is much more important than cognitive learning and has demonstrated a variety of ways to implement this. The work of both Ausubel and Rogers have direct implications for our treatment of multicultural material if we believe that what we do in English classes has any implication for the society beyond our four walls. In like manner, Raths' work on values clarification present strategies which can be used to help students clarify their own responses to multicultural material. Torrance's work on creativity offers procedures which can be well adapted to multicultural education, especially when he outlines methods of providing non-evaluative procedures. De Bono's concept of lateral thinking, which can develop new ways of assembling given items, can be of immense value in helping students (and ourselves) become more pluralistic in our view of the world. Bruner's "Man: A Course of Study" is a prototype of what might be developed in multicultural education. The goal of the course is to rescue social studies from the familiar without making it seem bizarre. Despite the current attacks on the course, it presents methods which could be highly useful to multicultural education in English classes.

This list is obviously scanty both in content and implication, and it is intended to be so. As we survey the state of multicultural education, it becomes clear that we have ended the first phase. The necessary materials have been developed or made more accessible. The question for the future is, "What will we do with them?" We are now faced with the even more difficult task of developing a coherent approach to multicultural education, one based on sound theory with an eye to the ultimate goals of multicultural education.

To do this we must reconsider the work of the theorists mentioned above and many others as well. They have presented us with a basis from which to work, and we must resist the temptation to grasp quickly at the first available idea. If we do not consider the "how" of our multicultural education as well as the "what" we may be left to echo Eliot, "That is not what I meant at all. That is not it, at all."

FOOTNOTES

[1]Darwin Turner. "Literature and Society's Values." English Journal, 60:577-86.

[2]Pat Haas. "Ethnic Studies - Not Separate But Not Equal." College Management, 9:20-22.

[3]Orlando Patterson. "Ethnicity and the Pluralist Fallacy." Change Magazine, 7,2:10-11.